



**TO: Senate and House Natural Resources Committee Members**  
**RE: HB 4677 and 4678, SB 388 and 389 -- State Parks Funding Bills**  
**DATE: Weds, 1 April 2009**  
**FROM: Christopher Graham (Past Chair and Treas, Michigan Natural Areas Council; Board Chair, Michigan Environmental Council; CCMSP Member**

I come before you today standing upon the shoulders of the members of two very old and venerable environmental organizations, the Michigan Natural Areas Council and the Michigan Botanical Club, and upon the shoulders of their forbears the Michigan Horticulture Society and the Michigan Parks Association, upon the shoulders of the many, many people who have volunteered countless time and expertise for now 90 years – to support, advise, cajole, collaborate, survey, study, help fund -- to in every possible way assist in developing our wonderful State Park system.

Many of these folks are or were expert in their fields of natural science. They shared and cherished the ideas of public parks, environmental education, and the protection of the State's best natural features and scenic beauty.

And they shared these ideas and worked on them together with a long line of outstanding State employees.

Among the most notable of all these people are P. J. Hoffmaster and Genevieve Gillette. Life long friends who met in school at Michigan Agricultural College before 1920 – their collaboration and their lives entwined steadily, over decades, to provide the always supportive people of Michigan with parks – with parks that captured many of Michigan's great scenic places, its finest natural areas. P. J. Hoffmaster began as the first State Parks Chief, and became Director before his long career was done. Genevieve Gillette led active organizations that studied and pressed and pushed and ultimately succeeded with Hoffmaster and the Department and the Legislature in gaining for Michigan a truly great, world-recognized state park system.

Were these two able to be here today they would give resounding support for these bills. They would tell you that AT LAST, we can have a stable, dependable, sustainable, adequate (but by no means extravagant) funds flow for both park operations and for infrastructure and major maintenance needs. AT LAST we can escape the boom and bust cycle of funding (via bond issues) that have been helpful but erratic. AT LAST we can resolve the gathering agony of the

last few years of living with zero general fund support (not long ago it was 75% for operations) -- when every reserve has been spent, when every practical fee increase has been made, when every useful consolidation of staff and activities has been done. AT LAST, ideas are on the table here that would allow us to avoid a dismal immediate future for Michigan's Parks -- many park closures and staff reductions.

Were they here today, Pete Hoffmaster and Genevieve would tell you our Parks contain our living crown jewels -- the State's great natural features, it's most wonderful places to visit and see, and it's most terrific outdoor educational opportunities. They would tell you funding to sustain these places is vital, important, necessary, and strongly expected by all upon whose shoulders we stand. They would tell you that our wonderful parks are under threat not just from collapsing infrastructure too long untended, but by new and increasing troubles from invasive species, from changes in water resources, from growing effects of climate change. They would say that like the jewels in the tower of London or the paintings in the Louve -- ours need stable, constant, conserving stewardship, on a scale equal to the task.

Were they here today they would give you ringing salute! They would thank you so much for considering these bills! They would appreciate the bill sponsors, and recognize you Legislators here for this hearing today.

They would especially recognize and thank Senator Birkholz for her enduring concern and leadership in these tough times!

They would want you to promptly pass these bills, move them onward through the process. They would want to celebrate their passage and our Park system's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary, later this year!

We are here today, standing on all their shoulders -- hope and ask you to go successfully forward.